

European Union: Dishonest Brokers in upcoming Palestinian parliamentary elections

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The European Union (EU) should be ashamed of itself. It has thrown aside the principals of democracy for partisan politics and hypocrisy. In the run up to the Palestinian parliamentary elections, the EU has addressed Palestinian politics and made threats in the process.

On December 19, the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana stated, "All the political parties have the right to be part of the elections, but there is a certain code of conduct that has to be accepted by everybody." He continued, "It's very difficult that parties who do not condemn violence ... can be partners for the future." Solana later warned that if the Palestinian Authority (PA) let Hamas run in the parliamentary elections, the EU could cut tens of millions of dollars of funding to the PA.

Why should this call be limited to Hamas? It is quite clear that the EU should lambaste the Israeli government's repeated use of violence against an occupied population. Is the EU planning on slapping sanctions on Israel for its constant aerial assaults on the West Bank and Gaza Strip? Are they going to take severe action against the continued expropriation of Palestinian land and resources? The EU, in its mission to prevent violence and find "partners for the future," should at least take issue with the policy of extrajudicial assassinations, the bulldozing of homes, the expansion of settlements, and the multitude of restrictions that bring the Palestinian society one step closer to the third intifada.

There has been no word that America, who also opposes Hamas' participation in the elections, will cut any of the 3 billion dollars in aid it gives to Israel annually. Furthermore, the Quartet hasn't convened to discuss placing an arms embargo on Israel, cutting off the supply of American products such as tanks, helicopters, and bulldozers that are used in the occupied territories. If these democratic institutions are going to put forth a "code of conduct," it's only fitting that everyone abide by the code.

Who's the Culprit?

The EU is trying to deligitimize Hamas at the behest of Israel, while the Palestinian people suffer under Israeli aggression. This double standard illustrates a fundamental flaw in the EU's approach to the conflict and its disregard for international law and democracy.

According to Al Jazeera, Solana's remarks came after the United States government past a resolution that stated, "American support for the Palestinian Authority would be placed at risk by any Hamas participation in government." The US and the EU are not trying to tell the Palestinian people who they can elect: they are just willing to bankrupt Palestinian society in

case the people partake in the democratic process.

The Palestinian Mentality

According to recent polls, the majority of Palestinian society is against attacks on Israel and wants to return to negotiations. However, the Palestinian people want the principals of the Sharm al-Sheik cease-fire enforced by Israel and the Geneva Conventions implemented.

Since the last suicide bombing in October, nearly 50 Palestinians have been killed, hundreds more have been wounded, while the campaign of mass arrests continues. Israel claims the people of Gaza are now free, yet incursions continue as the 1.4 million residents fall deeper into poverty, their trade flow halts and their borders close. Last week, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz decided that the bus convoys between Gaza and the West Bank, which were scheduled to start December 15, were not going to be initiated. Although the US “urged” Israel to make the deal go through, as promised to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Mofaz chose to revert back to unilateralist policy due to “security concerns.”

Armed Struggle and Civilians

The targeted attacks on the civilian population of Israel are in contradiction to peace. Saeb Erekat, a senior Palestinian negotiator, denounced the October 26 suicide bombing in Hadera, “We condemn this attack in Hadera, as we’ve always condemned suicide attacks on Israeli civilians, and we hope that we will not allow this attack or any attack to undermine the cessation of violence between the two sides.”

According to international law, the Palestinian people, including militant groups, have a right to armed struggle against an illegal occupation. Nevertheless, in this armed struggle, acts that target a civilian population are in violation of that right. Ironically, what was not mentioned by the EU or the US Congress is that Hamas has not been linked to a suicide bombing since the start of the Sharm al-Sheikh cease-fire and has, for the most part, held true to it.

Preserving Democracy

One cannot expect Hamas to renew the terms of the cease-fire if it’s punished by the international community for trying to adhere to democratic principles, while its “partner for peace” flagrantly violates the terms of the cease-fire. On December 21, Al Jazeera reported that a Hamas leader was killed by Israeli forces in the Occupied Territories. This should be condemned by America, the EU and the rest of the international community to prevent further flare-ups in the conflict.

Deterring democracy in the Palestinian territories will only bring Israel further away from peace. Hamas, who is moving in the direction of assimilation and non-violence, will be pushed back down the path of radicalization if they are cut off by the political process.

The US and the EU must be clear and even handed as brokers in the conflict: acts of illegal aggression must not be tolerated—by *any* party.

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